

Interviewee: OW_02

Name: Joan Arthur

Role / Title: Old Weather Contributor

Organisation: Old Weather

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Interviewer: Paula Goodale

Note: Where names are shown [name] the name has been changed to preserve anonymity.

1 Q: So can we start by-- if you could tell me a little bit about yourself, in particular any kind of
2 education, career, leisure interests that might be relevant to the Old Weather project.

3 A: Well, it's a kind of curiosity really, and that's the job that I do at the moment. I work for the
4 Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University. And this kind of came out of nowhere in
5 as much as I was doing much more senior administration, had done some in the English
6 faculty, and theology. Theology turned out to be a very, very strange place to be, full of
7 extremely weird people, and which I didn't match at all. So I just kind of fled and saw this job,
8 office coordinator, just covering reception at the Environmental Change Institute, and I thought
9 oh yeah, that sounds a bit better, something a bit more science-y, that will suit me. And so I
10 took a sort of dive in pay, but turned up in a place where it was full of really, really nice people
11 to work with, who are trying to save the planet so this seemed to be, you know, a reasonably
12 right on thing to do.

13 A: And erm, I just--,

14 Q: So is--,

15 A: Sorry?

16 Q: Sorry, I was going to say, is that an interest you've had over a period of time, kind of
17 environmental issues?

18 A: Not in huge particular, but just as a sort of ordinary responsible citizen. You know, somebody
19 says as a responsible citizen you'll now go and put your bottles in the bottle bank. You go,
20 okay I'll put my bottles--, Just that sort of thing.

21 But I thought well, okay you know, it's just a kind of winner winner on this particular occasion,
22 nice job, nice people, and then possibly saving the planet to boot. Yeah, what's not to like?
23 So I got stuck in there, I thought oh I'll probably only do this for a couple of years, but in fact
24 actually, the people there turned out to be really quite interesting to work for. And always
25 interesting research going on. Now I was sat there one morning, I switched on the computer,
26 and they have like picture and stuff on the front page. And there's often like a little events
27 thing that comes up, rolls on the side, well used to anyway. And it said something, it said Old
28 Weather citizen science, and I thought, do you know I've been meaning to do some citizen

29 science for a long time, just on the basis of, you know, there's a computer sat at home, it's
30 doing nothing, I have some spare time, well, you could probably [inaudible] some spare time,
31 why not give it a go. And as it was to do with weather and the climate, and we had just
32 recently got ourselves a professor of the climate, I thought oh well, give it ago, give it a try.
33 And that's what I did. And I had a look at some of the other Zooniverse stuff that was there as
34 well, like measuring craters on the moon. My god how boring can a job--,

35 Q: [Laughs].

36 A: It's only beaten I suspect by the plumes of Mars. And the other thing was like what shape is
37 this galaxy? Well, I think they're the sort of thing that if you get your eye in, you feel a real
38 level of confidence. I had no sense of confidence with this work whatsoever, but looking in a
39 book, reading somebody else's handwriting and filling in the little boxes seemed like eminently
40 doable, and much more sort of up my alley as it were. And so that's why I started with Old
41 Weather. Plus they've got a very easy forum to get into. It just seemed much more complex in
42 terms of where to go for help, what to do, and where.

43 Q: Yeah. And I'm going to come onto the forum a bit later. So how long ago was it that you got
44 started?

45 A: I think, well it must be about this October would be three years I think, something like that.

46 Q: Crikey, that's quite a commitment.

47 A: Yeah.

48 Q: So would you say that your activity levels have kind of increased over time? Have they stayed
49 about the same? How much time do you spend on it?

50 A: At the moment virtually nothing at all because work is so heavy duty, and by the time I get
51 home I actually just can't face to go on and start doing something kind of moderately serious.
52 And I think that there was a sort of general decline when my mother had died a little while
53 back. That released a lot of time and then I did an awful lot of it, but inevitably there are other
54 things that needed catching up with, and that's where I am at the moment. It's getting a proper
55 balance. So I think probably by the end of they year that I will be expecting to do something
56 like seven or eight hours a week on it. You know, like say an hour a night, [inaudible 0:05:06]
57 that sort of thing. Somewhere around about that sort of area.

58 Q: Okay, so I want to really start with the transcribing activities. Can you tell me what that
59 involves, how you go about it?

60 A: Right you, first of all you sign yourself into Old Weather's super secret zone, the bit where they
61 try and make sure that it's really difficult for spammers and the like to get in and cause trouble.
62 And then you pick your vessel, just whichever one you fancy doing, it could be the name of it,
63 it could be the shape of it, it could be the colour of it. It could be where it's going, it could be
64 the fact it's got one sign says this is easy, you know, this will not require much brainwork. Or it
65 could be that you want to do one that's really complex because you fancy getting a bone to

66 have a chew on. For me, when we started into the American phase there was erm, I tried a
67 few of them, there was one called The Patterson, which seemed moderately interesting at the
68 time, so I'm stick it out with that one. And then you tend to get locked in with one, and you get
69 used to the handwriting. So you open yourself up a page and you see the physical left or right
70 hand side of the book when it's open, and with the American ones it tends to be weather
71 information on the left, and other stories on the right, including a sort of long hand version of
72 the weather. Which is a, it's a bit of a curiosity that that they basically repeat everything they
73 put in the other column on the other page. And then depending on whether you're noting the
74 location or the date or the weather it'll bring up a little sort of database box, and you just fill
75 those boxes in according to the details that the sailors have allowed you to have. Because
76 The Patterson when it's in dock it's just like, "Oh can somebody go around and do something
77 with the temperature?" "Yeah all right then, all right." "How many temperatures do I need to
78 put in?" "Well, don't bother with two out of three of them." "Oh all right then." So it's a little bit
79 dependent onto them as to how much you then have to put in. And sometimes if you're, like
80 when you're in early days going into this sort of thing it was a bit freaky facing these things.
81 Now you just go, hey that's how some boats work, and you just carry on with it. And then the
82 next page is more likely to be the one where you'll be using the description of events, so it just
83 brings up an events box. Or there might be a 'mentions', in which case it says, you know, is
84 this a ship or a person? If it's a person we like to put in the name and their designation, which
85 is considered to be sort of part of their name so, Bloggs, Bloggs, Seaman, whatever. That kind
86 of thing. And then to some extent that page is the more awkward bit because it relies on what
87 you're interested in to be filled out. Now some people will just go, look you know, if we're
88 going to make the most out of this just put it all down. So whatever's in there that's not a
89 repeat of the weather they'll put in, you know, three cans of beans thrown overboard that'll go
90 down. Other people will go, frankly who cares? And they'll just say nothing on that page and
91 go on to the next. And that's where things like become quite variable, and I think that some
92 time that's perhaps where we've lost people because they've gone, "I don't understand why
93 something's absolutely dead set and other bits are variable." So I think we probably--, it suits
94 a certain mindset, and it certainly suits mine, in going through those pages.

95 Q: I was going to say, what do you most enjoy about the transcribing? Which aspects do you get
96 most out of?

97 A: Oh certainly the events page. In all truth. Having said that, actually because they do less
98 events in the American thing I've actually pulled myself back to noticing more of what's
99 actually going on in the weather page. So but yeah, a little bit of both, but I think really the
100 events page can be really stunning, actually, it can be breathtaking. It can either be as boring
101 as heck, you know.

102 Q: [Laughs]. Can you give me an example of a good one? What would you, you know, find
103 particularly interesting?

104 A: Oh two things, one to do with the environment, one to do with the people. The Patterson
105 ended up in Rio, about 1890, something like that. And they didn't have an emperor for very
106 long in Brazil, but they did have a second emperor, and the guy, I can't think of his name now,
107 was a savant, he was one of these intensely intelligent people. So they invited him onboard,
108 they showed him all the equipment that they had as part of the survey, they handed him what
109 they'd done in the way of the survey so far. Yeah, I mean this guy was an incredibly intelligent
110 bloke. He'd travelled all round Europe. I mean in the end he ended up a pauper, but it was so
111 interesting just that one little shot into his life of who he was, you know how rich he was, but
112 how to him sort of intelligence and education and science were so important. It was just a
113 lovely little jewel that shone out of a load of pages of oh the mud was blue, the mud was grey,
114 the mud was, you know. I've seen enough mud I don't want any more. So that was like a
115 people one.

116 And another boat I'd done earlier on, which didn't last that long because it burnt itself down
117 bless its cotton socks, was The Roger-- Rogers. And they were like a bunch of lovelorn
118 sailors. In fact actually, they'd made one comment just before they left San Francisco saying
119 many women visited the ship.

120 Q: Oh [laughs].

121 A: Indeed. And on the top of that page, or it might be the next one, there's a little love heart with
122 an arrow through it. Now those sorts of things the doodles in these books are as rare as hen's
123 teeth. They're very formal documents, you don't expect to see them. You don't even often
124 see a crossing out, somebody's like thought really carefully about what they're going to put in,
125 it goes in it doesn't get crossed out. So this was really like, we're all going to be exploding
126 with excitement. And they were like a bunch of lovelorn poets, all the descriptions about
127 where they went. And they didn't put down latitude or longitude, but it was you know, very
128 waxing lyrical about the skies and the sunset, and how they saw the aurora and all the rest of
129 it, what the land looked like when they got there. And it didn't surprise me when towards the
130 end of the logbook it said we're building ourselves a reading room on the top of the deck. And
131 I thought, right okay well, fair enough I can just imagine them sitting around saying, "Who's
132 reading the Wordsworth tonight?" "Could anybody lend me some Shelley?"

133 Q: [Laughs].

134 A: They were very, very good with words. And unfortunately they were also very good at
135 warming things up, and they warmed the boat up so much it burnt down and they then had to
136 be rescued.

137 Q: Oh dear.

138 A: Which is another long story.

139 So there's all of those things going on. Equally, you might find one with just tiny, tiny, tiny little
140 comments that just you look at it and it says so much, and it will be something like, er,
141 provided new china to the Captain's table, or something like that. And you think, oh god,

142 somebody's had to go into San Francisco, wander around all these shops, do a bargain, see
143 what they want, should they get something with a nice pattern on or plain or whatever. It's got
144 to be bought, it's got to be wrapped in store, it's got to be delivered to the ship, dah, dah, dah,
145 dah, dah. It's all the things that hang around that tiny little comment that I find really
146 interesting, and yeah.

147 Q: So do you ever follow up on any of those little stories? Do you kind of do any further research
148 on them?

149 A: We do actually. And then in many respects we're absolutely blessed by the fact we're doing
150 American ships at the moment, we've got a number of people transcribing from America
151 because it's so easy to get hold of old newspaper stuff there, they're all scanned in, and some
152 are partly transcribed, albeit poorly. And so it is relatively easy to go and look these things up.
153 I can't remember, I was trying to find the name of a company who'd sold them a load of curtain
154 fitments that didn't work, so they all had to go back again. And I thought, oh heck, eventually
155 these things get edited, and I'll talk about that later. But so I wanted to know who this
156 company was. So I just dropped a note into the forum saying look I'm struggling to find these,
157 and Jenny comes back saying, "Here you go then," with this stretch of newspaper, and it says
158 about this company. But here's the really mind boggling thing, and this is where you just go,
159 "Oh, I really enjoy doing this," is the other side of this broadsheet newspaper showed a picture
160 of someone, I looked and I thought god I know that face, it's Amundsen, and it just happened--
161 that day, he happened to be visiting, I can't remember where it was now, somewhere near
162 Boston, and he went to go and see, they'd done a replica of his boat and put it on the boating
163 lake in the park, and there was a picture of it next to him. And you're just like this is just
164 surreal, you know I just can't [laughs], these coincidences are just crazy. So you can really
165 follow up on really quite small things. And yet on the way through discover some even more
166 mind-boggling things. And you quite often see it on the forum, you know I went looking for
167 this, but look what I found.

168 Q: And so you share it with other people, you kind of discuss it between you?

169 A: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, quite often. Sometimes, well what I do is where we have a page for our
170 boats for discussion, well that sort of thing, I tend to look it up, put it in the discussion thread,
171 not really intending anybody else to look at it, but somebody will eventually edit the history of
172 the ship into something more, erm, more easy to read for the outside world, and it will be
173 public. So it's sensible if you find these little nuggets to chuck them on the discussion thing,
174 then the editor can find them easily. And if it's something that's you know, really quite
175 amusing then I'll double whack it into the chat section and we can have a little chat about it
176 there, you know, at least to date some interest. So it depends what it is really as to who it gets
177 to.

178 Q: Okay. Can you tell me about any challenges or frustrations with the transcribing?

179 A: Erm, yeah if you've got a ship like The Patterson that's not filling in all the details, and its
180 columns are in a different order to the ones in the database that's a pain. So I can't
181 reconstruct the database section that comes up to match The Patterson, and save that. So I
182 can't go, I'm doing The Patterson can I have my Patterson version of the database and fill in
183 the details and send it off. So you've got to be sort of doubly mindful of where there are
184 missing details that you don't just happen to slap a figure in there and then send it off, if you're
185 not really paying attention. So that can be quite frustrating. And also there are things like if
186 you see the person they want you to put in like the whole of the sentence. And actually some
187 of the sentences can start a long way back, they're not all blessed with the greatest of
188 grammar.

189 Q: [Laughs].

190 A: And I get a little bit sort of frustrated by that knowing that in truth all that's really needed is the
191 name and designation, and the rest should really effectively be part of the history so it can be
192 editable later on. If there was something critical to do with the climate then go back and say
193 I've read this thing about--, I mean there was a great example from one of the World War I
194 Royal Navy ships. They saw a field of floating lemons.

195 Q: Oh [laughter].

196 A: And I can say, what do I do with a field of floating lemons? And after everybody's cracked up
197 laughing and suggested all sorts of silly things, then one of the moderators will say, oh put it
198 here, or put it there, or we'll go and ask the scientists what we ought to do with it. But they are
199 asking this time round for comments on viewing animals, and well, we're doing all sorts of
200 extras now. So sometimes you do find something that's unusual, whatever, some cloud
201 formation or something, you know, what do I do with this?

202 But that's just I think, the trouble is, if you change the database to take into account those real
203 rarities we would find it easier because we're old hands at it, but somebody coming in new
204 would just go, "God this is mind boggling, I can't go through all of that," and wouldn't start. So
205 I think we're better set up where we are for some of us older people to have slightly more
206 frustrations, and for the newer people to find it easier.

207 Q: Sure. Can you cast your mind back to when you first started, I mean what was it like at that
208 very beginning time?

209 A: Oh god, absolutely completely nerve wracking, I really wasn't sure that I was doing what I had
210 to do right. And actually, it was the Royal Naval ships and they were easier than anything else
211 because the discipline was 100 percent there, it was very rare that you'd find an odd ship, you
212 know, the Royal Navy says you put that figure in there, that in there, that in there, that in there,
213 they will always be in that order, end of. And so it was always easy to just get your fingers
214 stung. Very rare to find anything in any way weird. But it still felt that you'd taken on quite a
215 responsibility. You know things like the shape of a galaxy they'll take something like if 80 out
216 of 100 agree or something they'll believe it, whereas with this one they're using two out of

217 three people. You just think well okay, if I was new, somebody else was new, and somebody
218 else was new, and we all ended up doing a boat out in Hong Kong and couldn't really
219 understand what the harbour names were, we could make a right old mess of this. So you do
220 feel kind of like it was responsible to think more carefully about how you trained yourself into it.

221 I think that was the thing that was very noticeable in those days was that there wasn't the
222 ability to train people in the way that we do now. And that's purely because one of the
223 moderators just decided to take the bull by the horns when we changed from Royal Navy to
224 America, to make things better. But in the early days it was like, you know, hold your nerve
225 and just go for it, and don't stop asking questions, you know if you're unsure it's better that you
226 ask than not, even if you look like a right idiot. And you're on the forum every five minutes.
227 But I was really glad I did do that because it meant that within probably about a couple of
228 weeks that I felt quite confident in what I was doing.

229 Q: Okay. Lets move on to the editing activities. You are an editor, am I right in thinking that?

230 A: I am. Yes I am, yeah.

231 Q: Okay, can you tell me how you got started on that and what it involves?

232 A: Oh right okay. I got started on it through guilt [laughter]. "What do you mean you're not an
233 editor yet Joan? Oh editing's really good fun you know." Oh yeah, I just feel the pressure
234 piling on from all those people who've been sucked away by the editing beast. And er, oh it's
235 true, it is quite a lot of fun. It's quite different in a way. But I think the way that Gordon
236 describes it is if you just open your mind and you see his words there, and you take those in
237 it's actually really easy because what he's saying is effectively I'm giving you cart blanche, it's
238 up to you what you do, you can take the stuff that people have transcribed already and just
239 concentrate on that, and that's an end of it. Or if you want to, you can re-transcribe the whole
240 lot, you can read every single page, you can see what somebody else has done and you can
241 make of that what you will. So in that respect because the Royal Navy people had no cash,
242 they were throwing themselves at our feet and going, "Save us," they got something out of it,
243 we got something out of it. But it was, you know, it was nothing sort of particularly heavily
244 driven by the climate people. So that was really quite enjoyable, and you know when you've
245 been on a boat, like there was one boat that I was on and there was an awful lot that I would
246 say you kind of noticed there wasn't much in the log. So the question is what else is going on
247 there? And in fact actually, the captain was writing a book about it. It's one of the funniest
248 books I've ever read in my life. So I thought, hell you know, I'll have a go at editing one of
249 these, and I got quite an interesting one to do, which started off round Scapa Flow doing the
250 sort of Northern run, doing a special kind of mine sweeping, which seems to have become sort
251 of forgotten and obsolete. So that was quite fun recording that because you know that you're
252 bringing something in history completely back to life again. And then eventually you know,
253 having been up in the wilds of winter, right up as far as Svalbard i.e. lets face it that's not a lot
254 of fun, their next billet is Gibraltar and the North Africa Coast. Hey that's a bit of a change. So
255 [laughs], get your sleeves rolled up, get your duffel coat out the way and off you go. So they

256 spent a lot of time plodding to and fro through the Alboran Sea, which is like that first section
257 on the Mediterranean. And that was also very fascinating, there were a lot of places in Africa
258 to learn, and you know, borders that were different then. And different things that they did
259 then, you know, you could tell things were much more relaxed with the way that they were
260 working. So you kind of--, again it's like getting into people's heads who are writing these
261 stories, and like Gordon said you know, you might just have a whole load of days where not
262 an awful lot happens, and then you might decided just to say right, got up had breakfast, had
263 lunch, had dinner, went back to bed again. But I thought right I'm going to do that, and there
264 were several days that they did next to nothing in Gibraltar port when it was just like life in the
265 Navy is good, three square meals a day and back to bed. And that was my report for the day.
266 But that would have summed it up in their minds at the time as well. So editing is a very rich
267 seam, but the downside of it is you could be getting climate figures in to an engine to work out
268 what the climate was doing, so some of us feel that we don't want to spend a lot of time
269 editing. Other people feel that editing is really where it's at and they've done enough
270 transcribing, and that's boring and now they've run out of love.

271 Q: Yeah. So where do you sit? What's your balance at the moment would you say?

272 A: My balance at the moment is I probably spend an hour or two a week doing editing, compared
273 to say like eight doing transcribing. I've got one on the go at the moment, I just ended up with
274 another chunk of it, The Moldavia, which is a Royal Naval ship so it should be quite
275 entertaining to do. Well it has been reasonably interesting so far. So I do do a bit of that and,
276 erm, it's really to kind of keep a balance going, so that the people who prefer editing don't feel
277 that they've become entirely separate from those who do the transcribing. Because there was
278 a big change when the American ships came in, and a lot went, "Oh it's nothing like the Royal
279 Navy books, I don't really understand what's going on here." And this off switch of comfort just
280 said this is not the familiar anymore, this is not what you chose to do, but what you did like
281 doing was the editing, and there's tons of that left. So a lot of people said, "I think I've done
282 my bit for citizen science climate transcriptions, let somebody else have a go and I'll go off and
283 do my editing," which takes a certain amount of experience to do I think.

284 Q: So you're doing more transcribing than editing.

285 A: Sure.

286 Q: But do you think is that through preference or is that through something else?

287 A: No that's absolutely through preference.

288 Q: Yeah.

289 A: Yeah. No I mean to my mind the name of the game is trying to find out what's going on with
290 the climate, and they've moved from wanting to know over the last 100 years to trying to get
291 back to 150 years ago, which takes you back into the early days of the Americas. They're
292 now talking about going back to say 200 years ago, which will just predate the formalising of
293 weather recording on ships internationally that happened about 1815. So they'll just about go

294 back to that. But there's certainly been mutters of doing things like Cook's report of his trip
295 round the world. In fact I think that may have been transcribed into weather stuff already. So
296 no, to me that's the really important thing. And one of the ironies of work is that we used to
297 have one head of the department and it clearly just was not enough with the way the
298 department was expanding. So we've got the director who does water infrastructure that sort
299 of stuff, worries about the Thames Barrier, etcetera, and then they hefted out climate and have
300 a half time climate professor, Myles Allen. And there was nobody to take him on apart from
301 my boss who'd already taken on her new director and somebody else. So I said, "Oh god,
302 okay I'll take Myles though he probably won't be much work." [Laughs]. Famous last words.
303 And so suddenly there I was sat there working for somebody who's using those details that
304 we're putting on the--,

305 Q: Right.

306 A: In fact actually, it turned out at the time his project wasn't using those, it was using something
307 else, but now he's taken on the project, which genuinely uses the Old Weather data.

308 Q: Oh that's fascinating.

309 A: So that's like really, really weird. And you know this er, something called BOINC where you
310 can make your computer work out what, erm, your computer downloads bits of information like
311 say you had a weeks worth of readings off The Patterson, my computer would download those
312 and go, oh well, from where The Patterson was this was what the weather looked like at the
313 time. And then somebody else's computer five houses down the street will be doing The
314 Patterson for the next whatever days, or they might--,

315 Q: Right, yeah.

316 A: And so with all those boats you fill in the patchwork and you end up with what the climate was
317 doing on any day during those periods of time that we've covered with the transcribing. So
318 that's really quite interesting. Anyway the BOINC thing, I'll just come back to that, you can get
319 a certificate. You do things called cobblestones, I don't understand it, I don't ask to
320 understand it. I get a cup of tea and the computer does the job that's all. [Laughter]. And you
321 get this thing and it's great, you can get yourself a certificate saying you've done quadrillions
322 of cobblestones, and it's signed by Myles Allen at the bottom.

323 Q: Right.

324 A: So I took mine in to work when I discovered this thing, and I just said, "Myles, Myles can you
325 actually just sign this properly for me?" He said, "Oh yeah, all right, oh you're doing this thing
326 are you?" So it was really quite nice to be able to get [laughs]--, the boss to do it.

327 Q: So there's the climate aspect. Is there anything else that keeps you motivated in working on
328 Old Weather?

329 A: The forum.

330 Q: Yeah.

331 A: Yeah. Once or twice, like there was a very significant one called Bruce. Bruce hasn't gone
332 completely, he might be back in about a year or so, we know he's an older character. And he
333 just vanished at the end of the Royal Naval stuff, and the forums simply imploded with grief.

334 Q: Oh.

335 A: It was absolutely astonishing reaction. I mean I knew that everybody got on and it was lovely,
336 and there was a very family feeling about it, very nice. The moderators I have to say I would
337 hand them out gold awards, they moderate so well, they are a phenomenal force given there's
338 basically only three of them at it. They do a really, really good job at keeping that place in
339 good order. And certainly it's not a very comfortable place to be, and Bruce was a great
340 humorist, you know he was always getting a joke out of something. So for him suddenly not to
341 be there just absolutely, you know, took the life out of it to some extent. And then with the
342 American boats being different, the databases working very poorly, and we'd done that to
343 ourselves because, well I think actually I might well have started it. I said, "Do you realise
344 we're just about at a million transcriptions?" This was a couple of months before we ended
345 up, we finished the Royal Naval stuff. And like people were going hell for leather, Pam was up
346 until I don't know when in the middle of the night determined, either he or Harry were
347 determined to be that millionth transcriber. I think they both claimed it in the end, but who
348 cares. I mean I was in bed sleeping myself. Anyway, so they did that and then I realised that
349 we were getting close to all the boats finishing, so everybody was going like hell for leather,
350 you know, would I be the last person to do a transcription for this thing. And what we did, and
351 all the effort we did was to speed up so fast that the people who were putting the next
352 database together didn't stand a chance.

353 Q: Right.

354 A: We totally pulled the rug from underneath them. We ended up with this desperate thing,
355 which nearly put me in an early grave a couple of time because I was frothing at the mouth,
356 [makes frustrated noises]. With like the frustration of how bad it was at various things. And
357 the poor moderators I mean the terrifying time they must have had trying to keep everybody
358 happy because at that point Bruce had gone, we'd had some fun, it was all looking like a
359 disaster, we were in the unfamiliar zone, and it would have been every easy then for
360 everybody to go well, you know I really, really enjoyed it, and I'd have wept a month ago to
361 have though we'd come to this, but now I've had enough." And somehow we got ourselves
362 through that, and I mean I realised early on what we'd done, and I think then it was a case of
363 everybody trying to be as jolly as they could, keep the things goings, lauding the work that we
364 were doing so far. Picking up interesting things from the American ships to try and make them
365 look as interesting as the Royal Naval ones had been. But I think we were on a knife edge at
366 that particular moment, it was very scary. We did lose a lot of people who decided that
367 actually, the whole thing meant so much to them that to cut and run was probably the only
368 sensible way to deal with it. And there's people like me who actually can't imagine life without
369 it.

370 If somebody said to me, because they put something out on the Zooniverse the other day
371 saying they were closing the forum for the galaxy people. I think what they're doing is actually
372 kind of replacing it with something else. And there was this awful thing, I mean it came round
373 and said this doesn't mean Old Weather, we are not closing the Old Weather Forum because
374 for any of us to close the Old Weather Forum would just be you know, a disaster, we love it,
375 we all get on so well.

376 Q: So what sort of interactions do you engage with in the forum? Is it mainly about the
377 transcribing and the ships? Is it kind of social?

378 A: It's an absolute mixture of both. It's quite interesting somebody will come out with something
379 really silly that happened on their ship, like Claire who was a chocolate eater and understands
380 the entire way that chocolate, it gets your brain going, all the rest of it, had on her boat that
381 some boat had lost their chocolate overboard and another passing boat was told this and let
382 them have half of their allowance of chocolate. Claire was going, "No greater love that any
383 man than to give over half his allowance of chocolate," 'cause she had spinning with laughter
384 'cause we know what Claire's like with this. So you kind of get used to who people are, what
385 they're like. Claire does poetry. Christine does artwork. Duncan we don't see an awful lot.
386 Jenny is the school ma'am who will keep you on the straight and narrow, by golly, but you
387 know she's clearly a very loving, very caring person. And everybody's now got their
388 personalities, which you become very familiar with. And you do find that there's a confidence
389 in that, so you know, if somebody's particularly miserable about something, you know I can't
390 do this, I'll be off for a little because I need to go and do such and such. And everybody will
391 be, "Well, it will be lovely to see you back," you know, it's all fine and lots of support. And
392 there's a personal message system there, and you'll often get people sort of dropping you a
393 personal message saying, "I haven't seen you on the forum recently," you know, "You okay?"
394 Which is quite often what Richard does for me or Pam does. And you know, it's really nice to
395 know that there's somebody else out there who kind of cares for you as part of the party. So
396 it's a very interesting mix of you showing that you care for somebody else who shares you
397 know, the sort of standards that you have in your life. And them showing the same thing back
398 to you. But certainly in the forum you'll get stuff from boats from any walk of life, anything that
399 anybody's up to, holiday photos, silly games, you name it, it all turns up there.

400 Q: Do you ever meet up in person?

401 A: Well, they do have a Zooniverse day once a year, which tends to move around. And last year
402 that meant I bumped into Christine, one of the moderators. There's not any way as such, I
403 mean one or two, and I didn't want to suggest it, but one or two bravely said, "Do you Skype?"
404 I said, "Yeah I do." So now and then I have a little Skype with Dan, who's over somewhere
405 near Niagara Falls way. And sometimes, rarely with Pam, who's just south of Sydney.
406 Interesting enough, he's a Lancaster lad originally and he's coming over in about a couple of
407 months time with his wife, so I said, "Well, you know, if you're passing through Oxford and it's

408 convenient to stop the night and you want a bed and breakfast, well you know treat me as
 409 that.

410 Q: That's nice.

411 A: So he's coming to stay overnight, which is really lovely, and I'm very excited by it. So we don't
 412 have anything particularly formal, and we don't have any formal sort of even Skype sessions
 413 that we could do. But at work, I think I am the only person who actually understands how all
 414 the video conferencing system works, and I did think to say to people once, we've got a
 415 refurbishment on the go. But once we've got that back and it's all installed, if people did want
 416 to come in and have a, you know, you can see everybody sort of thing, and have a chat about
 417 stuff then we could certainly do that sort of one or two days a year if people thought that might
 418 help. Some people I'm sure won't put their video cameras on, certainly Harry probably won't.
 419 But it's an opportunity for everybody to sit and have a chat.

420 Q: Okay. Lets kind of move on a little bit then. So do you use any of the Old Weather material
 421 outside of the project? Do you kind of use it for your own purposes at all? I'm thinking about
 422 things like blogging, or giving talks, or teaching.

423 A: Yeah, well [inaudible 0:36:24] erm, giving talks, I gave a talk at the history of the Museum of
 424 Science last April, not this one just gone, but Easter 2013. And of course it got to the end of
 425 six months on climate stuff as a special exhibition, we're looking round and it was just an
 426 inadvertent, you know it came round at work 'cause I'd sent the emails around saying, "Oh
 427 Joan, they're looking for somebody to give a talk on the last hour." "Yeah okay, I'll give them a
 428 ring. Would you like somebody on citizen science Old Weather?" And I think they nearly bit
 429 my hand off.

430 Q: [Laughs].

431 A: So that was really good. And I know Dan's done some. He splits his in to two parts, he's a
 432 boater. He does a boat-mans one, but he's also a historian, so he does a history one as well.
 433 And I think there are a few other people who have done that sort of thing, but I've certainly
 434 done some. And around sort of friends and family that I've given my talk a couple of times.
 435 What I will do, well I'm just short of time at the moment, is I'm going to move on to places
 436 where, and I think we might be able to pick up really useful people from in terms of
 437 transcription. So that will be places like, er, like church halls that do Skyping talks. So like the
 438 Channel Islands, I think Sark or somewhere like that you know, they have people to give a
 439 talk, well they can come in via Skype. So I thought of doing that, and doing perhaps the
 440 Women's Institute, those sort of places where you might pick somebody up. So yeah, I am up
 441 for that. And in terms of anything else it's just in terms of, you know, anecdotes and that sort
 442 of stuff between friends when we're yakking. That's really the only use that it has.

443 Q: What do your friends and family think to your Old Weather activities?

444 A: They think they're quite amusing, and they're really pleased for me that I've got stuck in with
 445 something like that, because they always think a single old maid like me needs a proper

446 [laughter], proper thing to do. Not that I'm on the telephone to them about every, you know,
447 hour of the day and sorting this that and the other out for them. It's just in case I got bored
448 with 30 seconds left in my life, thank goodness I've got something to fill it. So they think it's
449 quite fun, they know that it's something that's really been quite sort of enervating, because you
450 know, I've got a really active mind, and doing this particular project I find I am using my brain
451 cells a lot. So it is really quite useful, and I think they enjoy it. And sadly the day I gave the
452 talk because it was the Easter holiday everybody was away, which was just.

453 Q: Ah.

454 A: Yeah, I was so cross. But they all got it given to them at some time, but it would have been
455 nice if--,

456 Q: So are you trying to get any of them involved? Is there anyone that's kind of close to giving
457 way?

458 A: Oh they're--, I'm very, very reluctant to do that sort of thing. If somebody hears something and
459 say "Oh I would be interested in doing something like that," and I'll say, "Right well, here's the
460 connections, this is how to do it, perhaps see you there." But people almost innately feel very
461 scared of losing any spare time they've got, and if they see you making a move on them they'll
462 be like out of the door like a shot. It would be very difficult to get somebody to kind of trust you
463 after that. So I think it's something that people have to come to themselves. But there's no
464 harm in putting it as part of the thought process, you know, just like me I fancied doing
465 something with citizen science, oh look there's Old Weather, lets start with that and take it
466 from there. So I don't sort of--, what I have done is my friends who've got some kids at sort of
467 about eight and upwards have mentioned some of the other Zooniverse, like Serengeti, and
468 that's a really good thing because you just see photographs, it's very easy to identify the
469 animals 90 percent of the time, there's lots of help on there. And they get to see animals
470 really having pictures taken of them in Africa, and it gets their mind into the idea that I have
471 time that I can give to others that is relevant. So I've encouraged people to do those sorts of
472 things. And if anybody says, "I'll give Old Weather a trial," I say, "Well, here it is." I don't think
473 anybody has currently though.

474 Q: So you mentioned BOINC, do you do any other, or have you tried any other citizen science
475 projects?

476 A: Well, yeah. Hmm. My back up for when client.dot.net is not using the computer is fight
477 malaria, that's the one I keep I one second part. And it's usually either one of them needs
478 some work doing on it, so that's that. In terms of me actually doing transcription, I had a go at
479 the galaxy, I had a go at the mooniverse one, I had a go at the mars one. The one that really
480 freaked me out, and I just stopped doing straightaway was cell slider, and that's one where
481 you're trying to pick up different types of cells literally on a little cell screen that you see down
482 a microscope, and that I just didn't feel I could do with enough accuracy. If they'd had
483 something--, so there is a kind of sort of flow back thing there that says you're right, you're

484 wrong, you're right, you're wrong. We've sort of invented a system like that in Old Weather
485 whereby when new people are there if they're not quite sure they can say to the moderators,
486 "Can you go and look at that last page and see what you think of it?" And usually it's a sort of
487 positive, that's easy. But the cell slider thing I didn't really feel I was able to kind of get a
488 grasp on that. So I stopped doing that 'cause I think that's the responsible thing to do is just
489 say, "Hey, that's not my bag." Whereas Harry, he was in to it completely and didn't feel the
490 least bit worried about it was getting correct all the way through. So obviously, you know his
491 head works that way and mine doesn't, that's not a problem to me. There are so many little
492 things that you can choose to do in the way of citizen science you may as well do the thing
493 you can give best effort to.

494 Q: So how does Old Weather compare with the other ones would you say?

495 A: Oh, it's erm, it compares in as much as--, hmm, that's a bit difficult really. There's the
496 opportunity to be more involved. That's probably the phrase that I ought to say. For all of
497 them you could just go on, I mean there's somebody called Zovicor, who's doing The
498 Patterson, has done pretty much the same amount of work as me, very, very, very rarely turn
499 up in the forum to ask anything and just plods on and on and on, but is not a forum person.
500 But the opportunity to have both the social life and getting the citizen science out of things is
501 there, and that's the mix that I like. Whereas some of the others like the Mars stuff just
502 seemed empty, barren, devoid of personality really, and that does not suit me.

503 Q: Okay. I mean this might sound like an odd question-- do you collect any weather data
504 yourself? Do you do any observing?

505 A: Well, it's a funny thing well, I do observing in as much as at work people will, because I'm a
506 receptionist tend to float past, what I keep open all day long is the rainfall radar at Met Office,
507 and the surface pressure chart because one I am old enough to remember when every
508 weather set that the BBC did you saw the surface weather chart. And so I learnt how to use
509 that from a very early age, it means something to me. And the rainfall radar's just great fun in
510 as much as if you see Bristol having a washing about two hours before the weather's going to
511 reach you, you are going to get a washing over lunchtime, blah, blah, this sort of thing. It just
512 sometimes means that I put my coat on a quarter of an hour early and say, "Sorry, I'm going
513 home now," 'cause I have no brolly. So I do that kind of thing with people. And there's also
514 that famous one of stick your head out of the window and see what it's doing.

515 So I've got a little bit of interest in weather, but nothing like Dan. Dan has run a weather
516 station for the last, oh something crazy, like 50 years. Built a weather station for his area, and
517 as I say it's near Niagara. So that would be nice to have had something like that to do, but
518 probably I'm not the right sort of person to be committed to that.

519 Q: Okay. So I just want to finish up by asking you why do you think Old Weather is important?
520 What contribution does it make in terms of science, history generally?

521 A: I think, to me there's only really one important thing out of it, we can all live without history,
522 however fun it is, the really important thing is it's beginning to really show where we've made
523 changes over the last 100/150 years that have started to cause the planet to be almost on it's
524 knees trying to manage with what we're doing to it. And I think once people can say, "Look
525 we've said it looks like it's changing, you haven't really believed me, but this is how it was, this
526 is how it is now, and there's only the change of man in between that's done those things." To
527 me that is so immensely important to righting so many wrongs in the world. To keeping
528 people in a position where everybody can have access to clean water. Where there's a
529 population that's low enough it can feed itself and manage. But that is a really, really
530 important thing to do, and that's what keeps me doing that transcription stuff as the most
531 important thing to do.

532 Q: It's that understanding of the climate better.

533 A: Yeah.

534 Q: And being able to do something about it.

535 A: Yeah, yeah.

536 Q: Yeah, yeah. Okay. That's fantastic. Is there anything else that you feel would be interesting
537 to know before I sign off? Anything we've not covered?

538 A: I don't think so. No, no I don't think so, no.

539 Q: That's fantastic.

540 A: I think we're pretty much done, yeah.

541 Q: So I really appreciate your time.

542 A: Yeah, okay no problem at all. Good luck with the study. When are you going to have some
543 results? Do you know? Are you going to put something in the forum?

544 Q: Yeah, we're getting close to finishing doing the interviews now.

545 A: Yes.

546 Q: And we're analysing those over the next couple of months. And so then we'll start, we're
547 actually building a website as one of our outputs.

548 [END OF INTERVIEW]